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ABSTRACT

A 4-year survey involving 614 university graduates assessed professional education courses in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. The graduates felt that a course was of extreme value when method rather than content was emphasized. Courses offering assigned actual teaching experiences in the campus laboratory school as part of the course requirements received an extremely valuable rating. Implications concern three areas: experiences for the pre-student teacher to work directly with pupils in a public school setting, the university instructor's approach to the methods course, and a positive attitude by the cooperating public school teacher. (MJM)

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Teacher Education Grads Speak Out: Assessment and Implications

by John Sanders

Professional education courses in undergraduate teacher preparation programs have received criticism in the past. In an attempt to secure opinions on this matter, a four year survey involving six hundred fourteen (614) university graduates was recently concluded.

Each participant in the study had completed the elementary teacher education curriculum at a large midwestern state university. The graduates responded to a form indicating their opinions as to the contribution of each professional education course to preparation for teaching in the elementary school. Results of the survey are listed in Table I.

Those surveyed were also requested to state reasons for opinions given. Responses generally were in one of two categories: (1) the manner in which the course was taught and (2) the attitude of the cooperating teacher to which the person was assigned for student teaching.

The graduates felt that a course was of extreme value when method rather than content was emphasized. Also when the students were assigned actual teaching experiences in the campus laboratory school as part of the course requirements, that course received an "extremely valuable rating". Courses that were "not helpful"

Table I

Professional Education Courses	Course Not Helpful %	Course Somewhat Helpful %	Course Extremely Valuable %
Science Methods	11	30	59
Math Methods	21	37	42
Art Methods	52	29	19
Social Studies Methods	48	36	16
Language Arts/Reading Methods	8	26	66
Media (Audio-Visual)	10	28	62
Tests and Measurements	32	41	27
Problems in Elementary Teaching	11	37	52
Student Teaching	0	3	97

placed the bulk of class time on facts and information rather than on skills of teaching.

The second general reason for the opinions as given was the attitude expressed by the public school cooperating teachers regarding university methods courses. Statements like "You can forget all that theory now because you're in the practical world of the first grade classroom", "You've got to do it this way or the children will become upset; besides, this way works for me" or "Yes, I know social studies is important, but the reading groups will take all day" will lead the student teacher to think that the classes

in professional education courses were of little value.

Implications

An analysis of this opinion survey indicates certain implications for those in teacher education at the university and public school levels.

First, and probably most important, is the necessity of providing extended experiences for the pre-student teacher to work directly with pupils in a public school classroom setting. Table I shows that nearly all of the graduates felt that student teaching was extremely valuable. No other course approached such a high ranking. In most teacher preparation programs, this course is the final one in the sequence.

Therefore it is suggested that earlier experiences, beginning at the college freshman level, working in the public schools would be very worthwhile. In the present day of teacher surplus, universities and colleges need to develop new policies for admission to teacher candidacy. Successful results of an applicant's experiences with pupils in a public school could be considered as one admission requirement to the professional education program.

A second implication of the study is concerned with the university instructor's approach to the methods course. The work is more meaningful to the student when the instructor

gives prominence to method rather than content. It is expected that necessary factual information or the source of such information is a part of the student's knowledge gained from courses of two or more years in general education. In methods, the education major is ready for the "how of teaching" instead of more "what" of the various disciplines.

If logistics permit, the methods instructor should involve his students with specific assignments with public school pupils. Accomplishment of a cluster of performance objectives associated with pupils seems to be a more valuable alternative than the traditional lesson plan writing and developing library-referenced units of study.

A final implication from the ... teacher education graduates' opinion survey calls for a positive attitude approach by the cooperating public school teacher. This person provides the needed guidance for the student teacher. However, it should not be expected that the student teacher will become a carbon-copy of the cooperating teacher in areas of techniques, classroom management, etc. Instead opportunities should be provided for the teacher intern to "try-out" some ideas gained in the methods courses. Verbal support of the teacher education program by the cooperating

teacher will also tend to give the student teacher a feeling of security as the experience of guiding the learning process of pupils begins.

In conclusion, it is felt that a survey of this nature could be a valuable instrument in evaluating a teacher education curriculum. The results could be considered when revising present course offerings and when developing future studies. All those involved in teacher preparation need to give some time, thought and action to opinions expressed by graduates.